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ABSTRACT

This monograph presents some basic theoretical perspectives on play and its relationship to culture, and outlines some basic concepts that can be used to obtain information about cultural differences between children in a school setting. Emphasis is placed on the conceptual and methodological tools normally used in anthropological fieldwork and their potential utilization in an educational setting. Specific topics discussed include: (1) play and socialization; (2) types of play; (3) types of games; (4) game categories; (5) cultural patterns and games; (6) dominant values and games; and (7) real and ideal culture in games. Suggestions about how teachers may systematically observe and record children's games are presented. Included in these suggestions are discussions of observational problems, structural versus casual observation, and parent and child interviews. Ways in which the knowledge gained through these observations can be used in bilingual, cross cultural education, in research, in staff training, and in the general school setting and in reinforcing school-community ties are also discussed. (EE)

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DEMYSTIFYING THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE:

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF GAMES AND PLAY

MONOGRAPH IV

by

George W. Rich and
Margaret A. Gibson

November 1978

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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THE CCRC TRAINING SERIES ON CULTURE

This monograph is a resource item for a training series on cross cultural education, sponsored by the Cross Cultural Resource Center (CCRC). By design this document is to be used in conjunction with Monographs I and II in the "Demystifying the Concept of Culture" training sequence. Monograph I, "Theoretical and Conceptual Tools", deals with the anthropological approach to the concept of culture and presents a series of conceptual tools which are useful for understanding the concept of culture. Monograph II, "Methodological Tools and Techniques", deals with methodology, introducing techniques and tools for studying the many aspects of culture.

The sequence is aimed toward developing a critical perspective on cultural problems and should be useful for many practitioners in multicultural situations who are interested in using new approaches to analyzing and changing conditions in their own communities. Monographs I and II serve as a take-off point for other topical and substantive concerns of the CCRC. These include monographs on specific cultural groups, the first of which deals with Chicano culture, parent/community participation in education, educational innovation, and the cross cultural study of games and play.

This monograph provides our readers the opportunity to employ the conceptual and methodological tools, described in earlier volumes, in the active investigation of children's games and play. Such study not only can provide teachers with knowledge about the cultures students bring with them to the classroom, but it also can be helpful in designing instructional activities and in developing in children a cross cultural and comparative perspective. Further, rather than viewing games and play as isolated activities, Profs. Rich and Gibson illustrate in the monograph the importance of a holistic (i.e. whole) perspective, noting how children's play activities need to be viewed in relationship to other aspects of a cultural system.

The bibliography, appended to the monograph, is intended as an ongoing, comparative resource guide. It includes regional references, not only to inform our readers about the availability of good game descriptions from many parts of the world, but also to help meet the needs of our diverse training audience. Although by no means exhaustive of the literature on play, the references do point up some gaps in the knowledge base. For example, the authors could find no references for Micronesian play or games. Hence, the descriptions collected by teachers have the possibility of furthering comparative research on the world-wide range of conceptions of play, as well as having immediate application to classroom settings. This is particularly true for cultures outside of a dominant European tradition and influence, whose game types, for the most part, have yet to be systematically collected and compared.

We are assuming here that teachers, parents, and students can all be researchers and that non-anthropologists can utilize the conceptual and methodological tools normally used by anthropologists in carrying out fieldwork. To this end we encourage our readers to become involved themselves in the projects included in the monograph or in other projects tailored more directly to their particular needs and interests.

Note to the Reader

Applying anthropology to education will be new for many readers. As with anything new and unfamiliar, there is a tendency to disregard material which does not appear to address immediate needs. Although a serious attempt has been made to link and apply abstract ideas and terms to educational practice, the reader is encouraged to discover added utility through personal application. The level of language used in the monographs will seem too academic to some, too simplistic to others. This is inevitable given our multiple target audiences and we, therefore, offer a plea for tolerance among our readers. For those who find the jargon of anthropology difficult, we urge concentration, critical reflection, and application of the substance presented.

Steven F. Arvizu
Margaret A. Gibson
Cross Cultural Resource Center
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INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, you have probably had the opportunity to observe children playing at school, and you have most likely participated in organizing play activities as well. Given this opportunity, you have possibly made numerous observations and formulated some valid, though casual, theories about play. The purpose of this monograph is to provide you with a perspective on children's play and an outline of basic concepts that you can use to obtain information about possible cultural differences between the children you interact with daily. Armed with a few ideas based on scientific research and some basic ethnographic tools, you can go beyond recess and the schoolyard and return with information that can be utilized in the educational setting.

The monograph is composed of three sections. The first section briefly provides some basic theoretical perspectives on play and the relationship of play to culture. In addition, it outlines a number of concepts and provides definitions that you may use to guide your observations. The second section is designed to serve as a brief field guide with suggestions about how to systematically observe and record children's games. It will go beyond what some of you will need to obtain information sufficient to identifying problems peculiar to your own circumstances. But it will provide others of you with the tools you will need should you develop a broader interest in collecting and cataloguing local games. The final section is intentionally brief, suggesting, in general terms, some ways in which you might use knowledge of traditional children's games in the school setting and in reinforcing school-community ties.

In none of these cases can we pretend that the monograph exhausts the wealth of scientific knowledge bearing on children's play; nor can we imagine that the research it draws upon is itself complete or sufficient. There are large gaps in our present understanding of the role of play in human social life, and though information is being accumulated at a feverish pace, a basic gap still lies with good descriptions of play activities in many societies. Hence, an ulterior purpose of this monograph is to suggest that, as a teacher, you are in an ideal situation to make important contributions, both in collecting descriptions of local games and in developing theories. We hope, then, that you will take the opportunity to improve upon this monograph where necessary and share what you learn through your own experience with your colleagues. Primarily, though, we hope that you will be able to use this monograph as a tool for gaining insight into the culture of the children you teach, as well as for developing an awareness of possible ways in which the aims and processes of formal education are compatible or incompatible with the orientations and values that the children bring with them to the classroom.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY AND CULTURE

Play and Socialization

Interest in play is as old as humanity itself. But for a long time play was viewed largely as simple pastime, as a way of keeping busy, or as a way of burning off excess energy. The latter is still considered a primary function of play within the framework of the school. The academic view of play has paralleled, in many ways, the evolving social view of childhood itself. Childhood was once thought

to have little or no intrinsic value, except as a necessary stage in getting from infancy to adulthood. The social value of childhood was gauged largely in terms of the extent to which the child emulated adult behavior. Hence, as late as the first part of this century, it was thought by many western scholars that the sole major function of children's play was to mimic adult behavior.

New views on children's play attribute much more significance to the phenomenon. Play is no longer thought of only as a means by which children learn physical skills that will help them become adults. It is a fundamental part of social learning. Interestingly, play is not only characteristic of all human beings, but of most mammals as well. One thing characteristic of mammals is that their infants at birth are very dependent upon the mother for survival and spend a long time in close association with her. Also amongst mammals, forms of behavior are more complex than amongst other animals, and a good deal of that behavior is learned rather than genetically inherited. So the long period of dependency in the mammal infant is also a long period of learning. It is a tribute to the importance of play to realize that most other mammals, in addition to humans, use play as part of the learning process.

Though specific play customs are as varied as human cultures, there are some general developmental universals. They begin with the small infant flailing its arms or kicking its feet, or delightfully experimenting with the laws of physics in knocking over a cup of milk or thumping the taught skin of a drum. As the child develops, it becomes increasingly social in its play, learning the types of play characteristic of its group. It learns what play is and what it is

not; what objects may be played with and how; what roles may be assumed in play; what it may do to amuse itself as a boy or as a girl, of a certain age. In short, all societies impose certain conditions on play and reinforce play norms. So what might otherwise be considered simple pastime or recreation is, in reality, a potent force for socialization.

Certainly child-rearing practices and formal education contribute in a large way to the child becoming a competent adult. But in play, children create unique social situations which model (or reflect) elements of their culture, and in these mini-social settings they exercise skills and cultural values essential to the social process of maturing. Most importantly, play permits the child the opportunity to convert values into behavior and to exercise skills they are learning, in a "safe," removed setting in which the consequences of failure or incompetence are less severe.

Illustration

The Tangu[1] people, who live in the Mandang District on the north coast of New Guinea, emphasize in their culture the value of equivalence between individuals. That is, all people are ideally thought to be morally equal, and nearly all relationships between individuals are permeated with this ideal. This value is a covert aspect of Tangu culture, but it frequently reaches a level of overt expression, since in many cases--such as in the attempt always to exchange equivalent amounts of food--the achievement of the ideal means going to great lengths to overcome practical difficulties. Often when the practical barriers are insurmountable, the parties involved at least agree by mutual consent that equivalence has been achieved. But one thing a member of Tangu society must learn to be culturally competent, is that he will often have to muster his skills and talents not to out-do his peers or to profit at their expense, but rather to maintain a state of equivalence in relationships.

This principal value and problem of Tangu culture is modeled in a popular game called taketak. The game involves

two teams, each with an equal number of stripped coconut palm fronds stuck in the ground, and with an equal number of throwing tops. The teams take turns throwing their tops at their own fronds. As the fronds are struck they are removed and set aside. But following the first round of throws by each team, the objective is no longer to out-do the opposing team by striking a greater number of fronds. Instead, a complicated system of replacing fronds and the difficult skill of throwing the tops without hitting the fronds is aimed at returning to an equal number of fronds for each team. When equality is achieved, the game is over.

Because the Westerner usually considers the ultimate objective of competition to be that of winning, this Tangu game would make little or no sense to the Westerner. It expresses a value which is typically Tangu, and not western. It models a value-laden problem, and through playing the game the native of Tangu society can exercise both his moral and physical skills to resolve it.

Project

Think of a game from your play traditions that reinforces an important cultural value (such as getting-ahead, individualism, cooperation, sharing). Describe the game. How is the value modeled (expressed) in the game? Does the game model the value by presenting a problem which can be solved in only one way?

What is Play?

A few years ago one of the authors reunited briefly with an acquaintance who had just returned from living as a Peace Corps worker in a village in Peru. There she had lived for nearly two years working to establish and organize a local school. When queried as to what kinds of games the children of the village play, she replied, "Oh, they don't play much. All they do is chase each other!" The Peace Corps worker clearly had little notion of what constitutes play and had probably missed a golden opportunity to learn native categories of play and to observe an activity which might have given her unique

insight into the local culture.

What is play? As simple as this question might seem, play is a difficult phenomenon to define in absolute terms. There is a burgeoning literature on the subject devoted simply to the task of definition; but we need not survey its breadth and complexity here. So far as play scholars are aware, people in all societies "play." But we have not been very successful at finding a definition of play that will satisfy everyone or suit the situation in all societies. Because we do not have good descriptions of play activities from many of the world's societies, we do not yet have the information we need about the range of culture-specific (emic) conceptions of play to compose a universal definition.

For present purposes, let us stick with a simple conception of play which equates play with fun. Moreover, play is fun created by the individual when he takes control of the physical and social constraints which usually control him.[2]

Types of Play

For our present purposes, we shall stick with an etic classification of play activities, that is, a classification which is not intended to be specific to any particular society, but which we, as observers and analysts, can nevertheless use as one means of organizing and comparing what we observe. We are presenting the following outline of play types as a basic tool which you can use not only as convenient labels, should you decide to compile a collection of local games, but also as a means of directing your attention to behavior you might not otherwise think of as play and to elements of play you might not otherwise pay much attention to.

(1) Vertigo. Vertigo is the sensation of pleasure and exhilaration derived from pitting one's body against external forces. It is the earliest form of play to preoccupy the infant, but is also a basic ingredient in many more advanced forms of play. Vertigo play is totally egocentric, in that fun is derived solely from personal sensations. Examples: Spinning around and around to become dizzy; zooming down a slide; swinging on a rope.

(2) Simulation Play. Simulation play is role-taking; pretending to be someone you are not. It is the first truly social form of play, for it is the first indicator that the child is developing an awareness of, and identifying with, other social roles. Examples: playing "mommy," house, teacher, doctor, nurse, outlaws.

(3) Games. Games are distinguished from other forms of play in that they first of all involve competition. Furthermore, games involve "sides" (two or more individuals or groups in an adversary relationship) and a definite outcome: winning, losing, or (as in the Tangu illustration above) tying. Games always involve rules which govern the course of action, the distribution of play roles, and the outcome.

Note: The class of games we are mainly interested in here are not the formally organized games we are likely to see taught in school or played under the auspices of official sports organizations. Rather we are interested in the "unorganized" games that children play; the spontaneous forms of competition which persist from one generation of children to the next in lieu of (or despite) the common attempts on the part of adults to impose inflexible, formal rules. Such folkgames are notoriously unfixed. That is, while they in all

cases have rules, they survive solely at the whim of the children who play them and are hence continually modified and molded to fit the children's needs.

Types of Games

Games are further categorized on the basis of the types of actions which determine the outcome. The basic question is whether the outcome of a game is decided by differences in skill, strategy, or luck (chance):

(1) Skill. A game of skill is a competitive form of play in which the outcome (who wins or loses) is determined primarily by the employment of physical strength or agility. Dart-throwing, marbles, balero, baseball, and soccer are principally games of skill. We might also include games which involve the use of non-physical skills, such as rhyming, spelling or acting skills.

(2) Strategy. A game of strategy is a competitive form of play in which the outcome is determined primarily by the use of rational choices (decision-making). Tic-tac-toe and chess are games of strategy.

(3) Chance. A game of chance is a competitive form of play in which the players exercise little or no control over the outcome. Some skill and strategy may be involved, but the outcome is determined mainly by a guess or by an external object, such as a spinning wheel or a pair of dice. Coin-flipping (matching), dice, and poker are principally games of chance.

Project

Can you name games of each type? Which have you played?

Game Categories

The following is a partial list of common game categories used in many game catalogues.[3] Again, these are presented primarily to direct your attention to elements of games that you might not otherwise notice. It should be noted, however, that since most extensive game collections are from European and Euro-American societies, the following labels reflect European and Euro-American game traditions. Whether they can objectively be used to label games from non-western societies and cultures is unknown, since there has been no attempt as yet to compose a comparative or world catalogue.

(1) Singing Games--games which involve competitive singing, usually of traditional songs.

(2) Dialogue Games--games which involve the recitation of oral formulas, often times ritual and dramatic.

(3) Circle Games--games, often accompanied by singing or dialogue, in which participants hold hands in a circle, or in which the players form a circle while one individual runs in and out, or tries to get into or out of, the circle.

(4) Chasing Games--games which involve chase and capture.

(5) Pack Games--games which pit one group against another in chase.

(6) Leader Games--games in which one person issues commands, which other players must follow. Other players compete with each other to take the leader's place.

(7) Rhythmic Games--games which focus on the employment of repetitive, rhythmic actions (e.g., jump rope), often accompanied by rhythmic chanting, singing, or hand clapping.

(8) Parlor Games--games which require minimal physical activity and are performed indoors, reserved usually for special occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations.

(9) Board Games--games which involve the movement of small objects on a table, board, or well-defined area of ground.

(10) Scrimmage Games--often called "running games;" games which center on moving an object from one established boundary to another (e.g., soccer).

(11) Hitting Games--games which involve hitting an object with a stick (e.g., baseball).

(12) Throwing Games--games which involve throwing an object at a target (e.g., basketball).

(13) Pitching Games--games which involve throwing an object at a person (e.g., ball tag).

(14) Manipulative Games--games which involve manual dexterity (e.g., marbles, jacks, balero, pegknife).

(15) Hopping Games--games which involve hopping on one foot, usually through an obstacle course or diagram (e.g., hopscotch).

(16) Jumping Games--games which involve jumping over or scaling an object or other person (e.g., leap frog, jumping squares).

Project

Based on your present knowledge of local children's games, which of these game categories do you recognize? Can you think of any games which do not fit the above categories?

Cultural Patterns and Games

Some important studies by anthropologists and psychologists have revealed that there is often a correlation between the predominant types of games played by people and other facets of their culture.[4] For instance, while all societies have games of physical skill, games of strategy tend to be found mainly in complex societies with high levels of political integration and central authority; and for the most part they are absent in hunting and gathering societies, where the highest level of political integration tends to be temporary associations of families called "bands." Games of chance, on the other hand, tend to be most associated with societies in which supernatural beings are believed to intervene directly in human affairs.

More extensive research, focused on relationships between play patterns and the ways in which children are raised, has led to the development of a theory which has application possibilities in bi-cultural education. Findings have suggested strongly that in societies where parents most emphasize achievement and independence in rearing their children, there is a predominant preference for games of skill. But societies in which parents de-emphasize achievement values and place a strong emphasis on obedience in rearing children show a marked preference for strategy games; and in societies where children are raised with an early and strong emphasis on responsibility, the children tend to show a great interest in games of chance.

The theory which binds these discoveries together is called the "Conflict-Enculturation Hypothesis." It basically states that

individuals are drawn toward certain types of games because they have certain types of learned conflicts. In games, the child can address the conflicts and develop the personal ability to cope. Hence, for example, if a child is raised with a strong emphasis on achievement--which involves teaching a child to do things for himself, on his own, at an early age, and to develop personal skills and self-assertion--the child will automatically develop some anxiety (conflict) with respect to behaving according to these virtues. Through participation in games of physical skill, the child is called upon to assert his personal talents, availing himself of the "safe" opportunity to acquire and exercise value-appropriate styles of behavior.

In the same sense, a child whose parents emphasize authority and obedience will develop some anxiety with respect to rules. Since strategy games characteristically impose rigid rules and minimize chance and skill, they offer the child the safe opportunity to learn to cope with rigid rules and boundaries. Similarly, chance games will appeal directly to anxiety about assuming responsibility, but in a more complex way. For the child who has been raised with an early and strong emphasis on assuming burdensome responsibilities, chance games offer the opportunity both to avoid responsibility for the outcome, if the child loses, and to assume responsibility for the outcome (as in possessing luck), if the child wins.

The Conflict-Enculturation Hypothesis is an important theory linking games with culture, in that games are viewed as important socialization tools. The theory may have direct application to your role as teacher and game analyst, for in the educational setting you

are able to assume a rare perspective on conflicts which emerge as children face the problems of performing school-related tasks. You may, for instance, already be aware of conflicts with regard to academic "one-upmanship" and competition for grades. This is a common area of conflict between Euro-American school orientations and some cultural orientations in societies which do not emphasize, or in fact, discourage, individualism and achievement. Utilizing this theoretical perspective on games, you might well enhance your perspective on home-culture/school-culture conflicts, since the theory suggests that a preoccupation with particular types of games reflects learned conflicts about the type of behavior that is expected of children as they mature.

Project

> Observe the games that children in your school play to obtain a good idea of what the typical play repertoires of boys and girls of different ages and ethnic affiliations are. Corroborate your observations by asking the children to name the games they play the most and to identify their favorite games.
>
> Is there a conspicuous orientation or preoccupation to the play repertoires? Do the children seem most interested in games of chance or physical skill or strategy? Are there observable differences between boys and girls, or between children from different ethnic heritages (e.g., Chicano children vs. Euro-American or Chinese-American children)?

Dominant Values and Games

Many studies, in addition to those already mentioned, have strengthened the belief that through involvement in games children are exposed in a concrete way to the core values of their society. In games, they can perform behaviors appropriate to their value

system and transform into action the elusive assumptions of their culture. This is necessary, for values are covert (implicit, hidden) aspects of culture. They are mental postulates that cannot be directly observed or directly learned. Values must be manifested in behavior, and games provide social models within which the child transforms values into a behavior style to make them his own.

Because of this unique role of games in the socialization process, games serve two complementary and inseparable functions, in addition to pure amusement. If you'll recall from the CCRC Monograph I, it was noted that people are not only the products of culture, but also the producers of culture. In this sense, games simultaneously express and form culture. Children are exposed to the covert nuances of their culture through participation in games; and in the very same process they give rebirth to their culture, creating it anew in each generation. This function of games thus makes them a unique and sensitive index of cultural values. More importantly, for the anthropologist and educator, games are characteristically emic (insider) sources of information. For while it is possible as an outsider to search in vain for the values and behavioral patterns people consider most important in their culture, the folkgames of children may make those values explicit from the children's viewpoint.

Comparative Illustration

In most Western, industrialized societies the maintenance of the social-economic order hinges to a large degree on instilling in children the positive value of achievement. Successful teaching of this value in turn rests on children learning to assert their

independence and learning to derive intrinsic pleasure from accomplishing tasks by themselves. This does not mean that cooperation is eschewed. Quite the contrary, achievement-oriented societies also place a strong emphasis on getting along with others and cooperating to accomplish tasks. Hence, one might say that in such societies there is a built-in conflict engendered in the culture-learning process. Children are generally trained quite rigorously in the values of independence, self-assertion, and achievement; but they must learn also to contain these drives not to be too independent or too autonomous. The ideal individual in an achievement-oriented society (such as the United States) must, then, perform something of a "balancing act" between developing his self worth through asserting himself, expressing his independence, and getting ahead, and doing so while maintaining an awareness of the needs of other individuals and the needs of groups.

Red Rover: Euro-American Variant

A common folkgame called "Red Rover" reflects these values and models this central conflict which Western children must learn to resolve. This game is found in every Western European society. In its basic form, the central person, "It," is pitted against the other players as a group. "It" is positioned between two boundary lines, while the other players line up along one boundary. The game begins when "It" calls out the names of the other players, one at a time, usually reciting a traditional formula, such as "Red Rover, Red Rover, let Johnny (or whoever else is chosen) come over." The chosen player attempts to run to the opposite boundary without being tagged by "It." If the runner is tagged, he joins and cooperates with "It" in tagging subsequent runners. But, if the runner succeeds in crossing to the other boundary, he/she may call forth all of the remaining players to run at the same time. The game ends when all players have been tagged, except one. The remaining player becomes "It" for a subsequent round.

In the course of the game each child is provided the opportunity to assert himself as an individual. But at the same time the game inevitably involves the formation of groups and the development of cooperative strategies. The runners cooperate as a group against "It," and the players who are tagged cooperate as a group against the runners. The culture specific opposition of self and group is concretely modeled in the game. The values of independence and group cooperation are placed in conflict and the only way in which the game can be successfully played is through combining both orientations.

Red Rover: Mexican Variation

Now, consider what happened when the same game was introduced in a Mexican village by a team of researchers.[5] The

first game was organized to include both boys and girls. However, it was immediately modified on the part of the boys to totally exclude the girls. This was accomplished by the male "It" simply refusing to call out the names of girls, leaving them standing at the original boundary. Following this, the all-boy game underwent three important modifications: (1) Stones and pieces of wood that had been used to mark the boundaries soon became weapons and, as each boy was called to run, several boys at a time would run out and jump on "It" and his assistants. At the same time, "It" took it upon himself to physically punish any of the runners he caught. (2) When the game was replayed, the runners submitted to the authority of "It" and instead of running when called, stepped out and waited to be tagged. (3) On the third try, the game was finally transformed to fit the model of central-person games typical of the village: rather than the game being one in which the person with the power ("It") challenges the group, it became one in which the group persecuted the individual without power (the next runner); for even the boys who were not caught by "It" quickly joined him to catch subsequent runners.

When the game was played by girls only, the transformation was quicker and more decisive. The girls decided that the objective of the game was to be chosen by "It." Hence, when called each girl simply stepped forward to be caught and to proudly stand with "It." The game became focused on the authority and her helpers; and the girl who was left unchosen at the end of the game considered herself an outcast rather than a winner.

These modifications of "Red Rover" concretely reflect what the researchers identified as a major village problem. While the villagers, as a matter of ideal culture, value cooperation and democratic ideals, they have developed a political system in which authority is whimsical and impulsive. This has led to a mistrust and resentment of authority, on the one hand, and a tendency to obtain personal security through association with authority figures. The reflection of these real orientations is apparent in ways in which Red Rover was played by the village children. The first modification reflected directly the conception of irrational authority and the hostility of the group against authority; the second modification reflected the tendency to submit to authority and seek security through personal association with authority; and the third modification reflected the tendency to seek security in associating with authority and to turn authority against the powerless individual. Unlike the Euro-American version, the group in the Mexican variation was not founded on a sense of cooperation as much as in the interest of accruing individual power and security.[6] Throughout the experiment, the researchers noted the conspicuous absence of cooperation between the individuals in groups. Finally, the marked difference in the way in which the boys played the game and the girls played the game reflected important differences of social character between village boys and girls.

Project

Recall in your mind the differences in the meaning of Red Rover as played by the Mexican village children and the game as it is typically played by Western European children. Based on your knowledge of the sort of behavior that is fostered in the formal educational system you are a part of, hypothetically describe how the orientations modeled in the games might be consistent with or in conflict with the school orientation. For example, is there a connection between what is reflected in the games and the orientation that is most likely to lead to success in the school system? What insight into possible teacher-child conflicts can be derived?

Real and Ideal Culture in Games

In the CCRC Monograph I, an important distinction was made between ideal and real culture. You may recall that the ideal culture of a people consists of the shared ideas about how people ought to behave as well as a society's perceptions and beliefs about how people actually behave. Such idealistic conceptions are readily maintained in myths, folktales, legends, national stereotypes, jokes, and even daily conversation. In some cases ideal culture will be consistent with actual behavior, but in many cases it will not. Because the conditions of daily living often make it difficult for people to behave as they ideally should, there is often little or no correlation between ideal culture and real culture (how people actually behave, based on observation).

Just as a peoples' myths, legends, and other forms of expressive culture may provide good information about ideal culture, so may traditional games. But in addition to this, observation of games may provide important information about real culture as well. The Red Rover illustration used above is a good example of this. But let

us use another illustration, one which also reflects in what ways ideal and real culture are in conflict.

Illustration

> Baseball and Football in Euro-American Culture. One thing that traditionally distinguishes baseball from football is the way in which teams are organized. In baseball, each player is assigned a role of importance; and though some players may by virtue of their assigned roles have more frequent opportunity to throw and catch the ball, each player nevertheless is guaranteed the opportunity to distinguish himself, and each player has the opportunity to hit the ball, run the bases, and score a point. It is easy to see how baseball, euphemistically called "The All-American" or "National" game, reflects ideal culture. It is a democratic game, unequivocally expressing the ideal of individualism and cooperation.
>
> Football, on the other hand, better expresses the reality of Euro-American culture. Power is placed in the hands of a privileged few (principally the quarterback), who determine what "plays" to use. The majority of the players (the linemen) provide the muscle power, but the glory and credit go to the "star quarterback," who literally climbs over the heads of his teammates to run with the ball.[6]
>
> Special insight into these games is provided when we note that while baseball is the "national game," it is football that consistently draws the greater crowds of spectators. Even within the public education system it is football that receives by far the largest share of the physical education budget, because it is thought of as contributing in an important way to "the development of 'character'." And in the end, the baseball heroes take a definite backseat amongst adolescent admirers to the school hero quarterbacks.

How do we distinguish the ideal from the real culture in games? Unfortunately there is no patent formula for this. Just as it is impossible to understand a myth without knowledge of the culture of the people who recite it and listen to it, it is impossible to fully comprehend the meaning and significance of a game exclusive of its cultural context. Without knowledge of Euro-American culture it would be virtually impossible for an outsider to know for sure what

values are being articulated in the games of baseball and football, much less which of the games reflects the ideal or real culture. In addition to possessing knowledge of a peoples' culture, it is important to obtain information about their games: peoples' feelings, attitudes, and preferences; how groups are organized to play, and the like. More will be said about this and the important aspects of play to pay attention to later in the Monograph, but for the moment let us conclude this section with one more brief example.

This time we want to emphasize the importance of paying attention to the different ways of playing a single game that may exist amongst a group of children. For how a game is modified as it is played by one group or another, will provide insight into what aspects of the game are considered most important.

Illustration

While the game of baseball has been highly formalized and ritualized under the auspices of professional sports associations, with written rules promulgated by baseball commissions and rules committees, children generally pursue the game in a spontaneous fashion in parks, dirt fields, and streets. In doing so, they are guided only by the traditions peculiar to each neighborhood and each group of playmates. Hence, the folkgame of baseball varies from one group of children to another, though commonalities between groups exist.

Certain play roles are the most desired. Children are the most enthusiastic about getting a chance to "bat," to pit themselves as individuals against the group. They focus most intensively on this single aspect of the game, practicing hitting the ball for hours on end, and exhibiting the most anxiety with respect to "getting up to bat." They will often be seen entering into lengthy pre-play negotiations with their teammates to determine the crucial order in which players will get up to bat. On many occasions they even invoke traditional counting-out rhymes (e.g., "Eenie-meenie, mynie, mo...") developed for the specific purpose of determining batting priorities. And throughout the course of play, the children are not anxious about whether or not they'll get the chance

to pitch or catch the ball; they tend to be almost exclusively fixed on whether or not they'll be deprived of the chance to assert themselves in the most individualistic role of batter.

Projects

Spend a few hours, if possible, observing children playing a team game. Try to observe a game free of adult supervision, and under spontaneous conditions. Identify the roles. Do the children change roles during the course of play? Does each child get the chance to occupy positions of power, or the opportunity to be in the momentary spotlight? Talk to the children. Ask them which "positions" they like to play the most, and why.

If local game patterns model the internal (covert) culture of a people, it stands to reason that the recreational activities formally fostered by the school should model the cultural assumptions upon which educational aims and processes are based.

After acquiring a broad knowledge of local games and patterns of play organization, compare the tacit orientation of these with game and sports activities officially sanctioned within the school setting. Do you perceive any incompatibilities, or are school-sponsored games generally in concert with local play traditions?

FIELD GUIDE FOR OBSERVING GAMES

Where to Look for Play

To observe spontaneous games the teacher will have to go beyond the school and playground, for activity within the domain of school is likely to be too influenced by formal school conditions and children's awareness of student-teacher roles to be conclusive to truly spontaneous play. The performance of play-ethnography literally requires the adult observer to venture into a child's world. The child's world of play may be relatively easy to recognize if it is

exclusive of adult behavior settings, or if it is obviously marked with easily identifiable play objects. But it may also be relatively difficult to isolate if--as in the case of Chicano migrant laborers--adult-child settings are not as conspicuous and the children play in the midst of working adults. In any case your first task as a play ethnographer will be to survey the community (preferably on foot) to stake out the places you can go later to look for play.

Each community will tend to have its customary notions defining play and non-play settings and occasions. These vary widely, so it is virtually impossible to provide you with patent definitions of play settings or to specifically tell you where to go to observe children playing games. Such culture-specific information can only be obtained by you, and the more familiarity you have with the community and culture of the children you teach, the easier it will be for you to find children playing outside the school setting.

Project

> Interview two parents, ideally from two different ethnic groups, and ask them to describe the settings where children customarily play. Inquire about possible sex and age differences. Next, interview two children from the two ethnic groups, asking them the same questions. Compare the answers.

What to Look For

A. Conditions of Play

You'll recall from the first section of this Monograph that one thing which makes play such a vital index of culture and such a powerful tool for socialization is that no society that we know of allows

children to play totally free of conditions imposed by adults. For psychological fulfillment to be gained the conditions of play must facilitate social modeling. They must be realistic enough to be culturally relevant, and unreal enough to connote that "this is play." And at this very basic level important cultural differences intervene.

When we examine children's play we must consider variations in the conditions of play. By this we mean not only the features of the natural physical environment which may, for example, inhibit tree-climbing (in the Arctic) or running races (in the rain forest). The most important conditions of play are cultural in origin. For instance, there are play norms which may prohibit playing with objects considered sacred; or which may prohibit boys from playing with dolls; or the fabricated environment which may restrict play to the city alley, the playground, the "play pen," or the work field alongside mother and father. Part of understanding the games children play involves taking notes on the basic conditions impinging on play from the natural environment, the fabricated physical environment, and the social environment articulated in play norms.

Project

Before becoming involved in actually recording children's games, make a number of specific environmental observations. You can do this while you are casually surveying the community looking for places where children frequently play. Note the presence or absence of trees, water ponds, gullies, hills, flat planes suitable for running, or places suitable for hiding, and whether or not the play areas are in close proximity to places frequented by adults. These initial observations may pay off later, for variations in play activities between different communities can often be attributed at least partially to differences in basic play conditions.

B. Community/Parental Attitudes Toward Play

Amongst the most important conditions of play are the prevailing attitudes of adults towards children's play. The Jivaro Indians of Ecuador and Brazil, for instance, do not consider dolls to be appropriate play objects, and so prohibit children from making clay dolls. Little girls, however, are encouraged to make miniature clay pots to play with. Hence, adult attitudes impose important conditions on children's simulation play. In addition, as reported by Michael Harner in his book, The Jivaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls, play itself is discouraged, since it is believed to lead to a disinclination to work as adults. Joking is also prohibited, for it is believed to lead to lying. Given these adult attitudes, Jivaro children must usually play where they cannot be seen by adults--a difficult undertaking in Jivaro society, since people live in tightly bounded family compounds and integrate themselves on an age-heterogeneous basis.

At perhaps the opposite end of the spectrum, middle-class Euro-Americans consider play so fundamentally characteristic of childhood itself that in indulging their children in play, adults often participate in their children's play fantasies. They devote enormous resources to prefabricating play conditions and objects, constructing special play settings variously called "playrooms," "nurseries," and "play-yards," and they train professionals to create special fantasies for children and to supervise children in play.

The best way to obtain information about parental and community attitudes towards children's play is through observation and interviews. Many of the observations you make regarding environmental

conditions (above) will also provide insight into prevailing attitudes toward play. This is especially so if the children's play settings are furnished with play equipment provided by adults. But be cautioned that the absence of tangible adult intervention in children's play--by means of providing toys or constructing play areas--does not automatically imply the absence of significant adult attitudes or interest in children's play. It is only that the accoutrements of play provided by adults reflect adult attitudes toward play as well. Notice should also be made of forms of play that are openly discouraged or prohibited, as well as those which are openly fostered especially during public or family gatherings.

Much of the information about adult attitudes obtained through casual observation will tend to be impressionistic and hence should be complemented with information sought through interviews. Such information is frequently easy to obtain, for the subject of children's play is not what anthropologists call "ethnographic dynamite." Unlike potentially sensitive topics, like religious beliefs or sexual mores, questions regarding traditional games are usually not taken as rude intrusions (especially coming from the teacher who is supposed to be interested in children), and they often evoke a nostalgic mood in which adults recall the games they used to play as children. If such a response is obtained it should serve as a cue for eliciting adult opinions about games the children play today.

C. Play Group Organization

Some of the most important information you can obtain regarding children's spontaneous play activities is that concerning group

organization. Unfortunately, a great portion of the material that exists on games in many societies consists solely of game descriptions, with practically nothing regarding the ages, sex, or number of children who played them, or under what conditions the games were played. Consequently, the game collections are of little value to those interested in the social significance of the games.

How much you are able to observe while watching children play will be affected by many things, such as the sheer number of children and the number of games being played at a single time; but as time goes on you will undoubtedly devise your own means of streamlining your observations. We have outlined below a number of group features that you should try to pay attention to. For it is only after you have made a number of observations on different occasions with different groups of children that important patterns will begin to emerge; and it is then that this information may become significant. In each case we have noted what kinds of knowledge can be inferred from these aspects of sociability.

(1) Group Size. There are usually practical limitations on how many children can congregate relative to the size of a given play area, and where there are few children in a community or neighborhood, individuals will have little choice but to play in small groups. But group size can also be an important measure of how much emphasis a culture places on sociability (i.e., the value of affiliating with many different kinds of people). For our purposes, games which involve very few children (one, two, or three) are called low sociability games, while those which call for the presence of relatively large numbers of children (e.g., team games) are called high sociability

games. Low sociability games often times model social systems in which the needs of the individual are fulfilled within the confines of a small group (e.g., family or extended kin group). There is little desire or need to interact but with a small number of the same people over and over again for different purposes. High sociability games, on the other hand, tend to exist in societies where people feel the need to extend relationships far beyond their small primary groups. Individuals will tend frequently to interact on a day-to-day basis with larger numbers of people, and fleeting interaction tends to be for a single purpose with each. Fewer relationships are supported or reinforced by other, overlapping ties, such as family and kinship.

In the former type of society (which anthropologists call a "multiplex" society), an individual might, for instance, always buy his fruit from a relative or only from a member of his church; but in the latter type of society (typical of western industrial societies), one might buy his food from a stranger at the grocery store without giving so much as a thought to how he is related in another way to the grocer, or whether he will ever interact with him for another purpose. We can see how high sociability games model this aspect of social organization, for they place special demands on the individual player. Such games usually have many narrowly defined play roles parceled out amongst the participants, and the individual must shoulder the task of monitoring the roles of a greater number of children in generating his own actions.

(2) Central Person Games. All games, as ordered and structured forms of play, assign roles to their participants. The assignment

of roles constitutes a distribution of power. In some games power is evenly distributed; each child performs essentially the same role, and the sense of competition centers on the personal skill of each individual. But many games operate on an unequal distribution of power. Typical of this type, and as close to universal as we can get, is the central person game. In such a game, the competition ensues between an individual (usually called "It" or "He") and the play group as a whole. Of relevance here is the question of where the most power lies. In a high power central person game, the central person controls either the resources of the game, the element of surprise, the power to command and order the others around, or the privilege of starting and stopping the action at will. In this case, the group must muster its strategy resources, or as individuals assert superior skill, to contravene the superior advantage given the high power "It" by the rules of the game. In a low power central person game, the group has control of the crucial resources, often using their advantage to attack "It."

It is important to note the distribution of power in games, for amongst other things it models concepts and conflicts regarding authority in a society. It is also important to take note of who the individuals are who tend to assume or be appointed the role of central person. Is it the largest child, the most skillful child, the group outcast, the most popular child, or any type of child at all?

If there are consistent patterns, they may tell you something about how children view authority, what personal traits they most value and associate with power (in a high power central person game),

or what personal traits they resent or have hostility towards (in the low power game). For instance, amongst some Euro-American children, when central person games are played by an age-integrated group, the older children will often assign the position of low power "It" to a young child, giving the older, more skilled children the opportunity to tease the younger and to exercise their physical superiority, perhaps acting out the jealousy and rivalry that often typifies age-stratified relations, especially in sibling rivalry. On the other hand, in Iceland older children tend to integrate young children into group play, assigning them roles commensurate with their skills.

The differences may be related to the caretaking roles given to children in the two cultures. In Iceland and many other societies, older children are expected to care for younger children, while in Euro-American culture, this is less frequently the case. That a younger sibling tagging along is considered a nuisance might, in Euro-American culture, be reflected in assigning low power "It" roles to these children.

(3) Teams and Packs. Another measure of game sociability, in addition to group size, is the organization of the play group into teams or adversary packs. In that team games lack a central or lop-sided locus of power, they are relatively egalitarian. But most of all they foster group integration and cooperation. In addition to physical skill or chance, a factor which often determines the outcome of a team game is which team has best organized itself internally with efficient and complementary role assignments. However, in addition to noting simply whether a game comprises teams or not, the

composition of teams should be noted. Are the teams always of equal size? Where this is not considered ultimately important by children, one team will usually acquiesce to the numerical superiority of the other. Do the children seem concerned with equity in the distribution of highly skillful children between teams? Are there team leaders, official or informal? How much attention children pay to these aspects of the team game may reflect the children's conceptions of equality and "democracy" in social relations.

(4) Rules. As mentioned in the first section of the Monograph, one thing which most distinguishes games as special types of play is the efficacy of rules. It is important to describe fully the rules of a game, from the means by which roles are assigned (by casual consensus, or through using counting-out rhymes) to the action which signals the end of the game; for the rules, which have been modified by children to fit their own perceived needs, are concrete expressions of what aspects of play the children consider important and worthy of regulation. You'll find it thoroughly plausible (and frustrating) to observe a game time and time again only to gain but the slightest notion of what the rules are! Interview data from children on rules can complement and supplement your own observations. But do not rely on composing descriptions of games from children's recitations of rules; children will sometimes recite one concrete set of rules, and then proceed to play the game according to another. Both observations and interviews are necessary to assure yourself that you have not been misguided either by your impressions or by what the children say they do.

Project

> Practice interviewing children about rules. Choose some children you know; perhaps some neighborhood children or even your own children. Pick a common game you are sure the children play, and note how much agreement or disagreement there is in the various renditions you obtain.

(5) Age Integration of Groups and Role Assignments. As with group size, the integration of play groups may be determined largely by lack of choice in playmates; but in many societies children tend to form peer groups based on age similarities. This is especially so in age homogeneous societies, wherein those the individual affiliates with on the basis of like age will form an important interaction group throughout his lifetime. The relative importance of age group affiliation in the broader social system is straightforwardly modeled in age homogeneous play groups, wherein the individual is establishing intensively close give-and-take relations with his age peers. In age heterogeneous play groups, the children are able to gauge their relations both with children older and younger than themselves, and with greater and lesser age-related capacities, preparing themselves for the more varied age-based relations they will have throughout their lives with people of different ages and skills. In the latter case special attention should be paid to the delegation of play roles to children of different ages, for the age-integration of play groups may not in itself be a mirror image of the children's real feelings. As in the illustration noted above, the relegation of younger children to peripheral, superfluous roles may reflect empathy for the less developed skill of the youngster, or resentment of his presence; and assigning

the role of low power central person to the less capable youngster may reflect hostility. But giving the younger child a high power central person role may, in effect, serve as a handicap system designed to compensate the youngster for his lesser capacities, making him an equal in the game.

(6) Sex Integration of Groups and Role Assignments. Much of what has already been said about the age-integration of play groups pertains to sex integration. But a few things should be added. All societies distinguish between male and female, and all maintain certain notions about male-female differences. Some of the earliest and most concrete (overt) expressions of these culture-specific concepts are in children's games and the way they are organized. Just as children are often expected to affiliate most with their own age peers, so too are they encouraged to affiliate with members of their own sex group. In most western industrial societies, by the time children are five or six years old, sex differentiation occupies a central part in organizing play. Boys prefer to play with boys and girls prefer to play with girls. The psychology of sexual identification is much too complex to explore here; but it should be noted that all societies impose sexual mores and codes of decorum and modesty as conditions on play. And since such codes vary widely from one society to another, it is important to take specific notes regarding the sexual integration of play groups.

How to Record Play Activities

Obtaining complete and detailed descriptions of children's games is not an easy task. Your first experience (if you have not already had it) will most likely impress you with just how much there is to observe within the short time span of a game. The experience of one

of the authors in organizing teams of observers to record children's play might be revealing in this respect.

The research project involved a broad comparison of children's spontaneous play activities during the course of "free recess" time at five elementary schools throughout Sacramento, California. Without going into the theoretical underpinnings of the research, one major objective was to compare play in ethnically segregated schools with play in schools which had developed successful bilingual/bicultural programs. Hence, in addition to recording all of the information outlined above, the observers were required to control for the ethnic composition of play groups and the phenomenon of spontaneous ethnic-integration of the groups. Each observation team was composed of from four to six trained observers, with each assigned a specific observational task. One observer, for instance, was assigned the task of merely counting the number of children in each spontaneously formed play group, while another was assigned the task of recording the type of game being played, and so on. While the tasks were performed with eminent success, discussions following each field experience revealed that the observers were literally overwhelmed by the ferocity of activity and exhausted when the twenty-minute play sessions were over. One observer described the experience as "being overtaken by a tidal wave of noise and energy."

The observers involved in the above research project were placed amidst large playgrounds and as many as 60 to 150 running, yelling, and frolicking children. It is unlikely that this many children would ever congregate spontaneously for play outside the school setting. In most cases you will be observing only a small number of children

playing; but then unless you can find someone to assist you in making your systematic observations, you will be alone. For this reason, we suggest that prior to undertaking systematic observations you draw up something in the way of a check-list enumerating the observational items outlined above.

Check-List

The crucial items to include would be: (1) number of children; (2) central-person, teams (packs), atomistic (no teams or central person), high-power or low-power central person; (3) approximate ages of participants; and (4) number of each sex. Each item could simply be followed by a check box, and all of this peripheral information could conveniently be located at the top of a data sheet on which you would actually describe the game:

Illustration

DATA SHEET

No. of Children _____ Name of Game_____

Cen. Pers.___Teams___Atom.___ Date_____Place_____

Hi-power Low-power

Females____Ages: 3___, 4___, 5___, 6___, 7___, 8___, 9___, 10___

Males ____ Ages: 3___, 4___, 5___, 6___, 7___, 8___, 9___, 10___

Description:

Observational Problems

In addition to the mere task of streamlining your observations (something which will come with experience), there are a few more specific observational problems that should be mentioned as a means of preparing you beforehand.

(1) Observer Intrusion. One should never assume that the presence of an observer will go unnoticed. It is best to operate under the assumption that your presence will, at least initially, disturb the children and in some way influence their behavior. This is especially so when the teacher becomes an out-of-school observer. For the children are very much aware of the teacher's role as monitor and evaluator in the school setting, and their identification with you will carry beyond the school. They may think that you are observing their play to pass judgment on their performance. Hiding behind bushes or pretending that you are not watching the children will not fool the children at all! The important thing about recognizing observer intrusion (or at least the probability of intrusion) is that you can 'control' for it; that is, you can include in your notes the possibility that the children are somewhat inhibited by your presence. As the children get used to seeing you in the proximity of their play areas the situation will eventually change and your presence will cease to be a factor.

How much of an intruder you are will be influenced by how exclusive child play settings are in the community. In Iceland, it was necessary for one of the authors to devote a good deal of time simply to sitting and watching children's games before actually taking notes, for it is rare in Iceland that adults trespass upon the

exclusive play domains of children. In your case, if the children appear to be overly conscious of your presence in their territory, you might consider this strategy as well: that is, postpone note-taking until the children have acclimated to your habitual presence.

Note: Above all, keep your role "above board." Inform the children of what you are doing. You might tell them simply that as a teacher you are interested in their games, that you would like to watch them play, and that you would like to ask them some questions. It is also important to inform adults in the community of what you are up to, so that adults will not mistake you for a lingering trouble-maker and feel they have to protect their children.

Project

> Go to a local play area. Sit nearby and observe children playing. Notice how long it takes for the children to become aware of your presence. Try this with different age and ethnic groups. See if note-taking changes their reactions.

(2) Clinging and Hanging-On. You should keep in mind that observation and note-taking are forms of interaction. The observer is often times not as aware of this as the individuals being observed. Children, in particular, tend to "tune-in" to the vicarious interaction that characterizes the observer-observee relationship, and often times individual children will leave the play area to cluster around the observer. Children with special needs for the attention of adults will day-in and day-out attach themselves to the observer in an attempt either to capture his undivided attention, or to obtain a sense of importance in being seen next to the observer.

In such a case a little empathy and diplomacy is required on your part. Sometimes the simply interested children can be satisfied with explanations of what you are doing; and once their curiosity is met, they will return to the play group. But real "clingers" often times have special needs to affiliate and are likely to be overly sensitive to the slightest rebuff. A simple remedy in such cases, one which benefits both the observer and the "clinger", is to encourage the child to help with the observations. By simply suggesting a task, such as counting the number of children playing, or inviting the child to take the role of "commentator," the child's sense of importance and self-esteem is protected, while you may at the same time obtain important information from a unique observational perspective.

(3) Rules and Variants. We have already said something about rules above, noting that there may sometimes be little connection between rules articulated by children and as they are manifested in actual play. We noted that it is important to record both your impressions of the rules derived from observation and rules as elicited from children. The best way to elicit recitations of rules from children is simply to assume for yourself the role of ignorant student, perhaps saying something to the effect of, "I've been watching your game but I don't quite understand what all the rules are." Given the sudden opportunity to reverse the usual adult-child role relationship, children in many societies will relish the chance to assume the role of teacher, teaching the adult. You should be precautioned, however, that in some societies such a burden placed on the child may backfire. This is especially so in societies where children have developed

such a strong respect for adult authority that they would feel very uncomfortable exhibiting anything but the greatest deference to you. Such an approach might also transform the children's view of you if they normally operate under the culturally-engrained assumption that adults know everything and are the ultimate sources of knowledge.

We should also emphasize once more the importance of recording variants on games. Because children's spontaneous games exist solely at the whim of children, they are highly malleable. Just as there may be many different versions of a local legend or fairy tale, so there may be many different versions of a particular game. You may later discover that the variations of a particular game are not socially significant; but without recording them you will have no basis for such a judgment. Unfortunately, many game catalogues (just like collections of tales or songs) put to print only a single rendition of each game, and the reader has little way of knowing whether the game as described is the only way the game is ever played, or whether the game as described actually has a counterpart in reality at all. On occasion, game scholars have gone so far as to take numerous variants on a game and combine them into an "archtype" form which indeed has no counterpart.

To reiterate the importance of recording game variants, merely recall for a moment the significantly different ways in which the game of "Red Rover" was played by boys and by girls in the Mexican village case study. What resulted were what could be called a "boy variant" and "girl variant", each revealing different values and attitudes which might provide important insight into differences between village boys and girls.

Structured vs. Casual Observation

Some examples have already been provided contrasting structured observational methods and casual observational methods. The brief example used to illustrate observational difficulties encountered during the course of a Sacramento research project was typical of what anthropologists call structured observation. The important point is to regulate the means of observing and recording behavior. The observer's attention may be focused on limited aspects of play behavior, or generalized to the entire play activity itself. But what we mean by 'structured', is systematic. Structured observation requires that you enter the observational field with a pre-established set of objectives, using a checklist (preferably written) of observations you wish to make.

Casual observation, on the other hand, implies that you will simply observe children playing without a pre-orientation of perspective. The notes you will write will tend not to be systematic, but more impressionistic, often written after-the-fact, based on your recall.

Both methods of observation are valuable and should be used in complementary fashion. Casual observation has the benefit of being less inhibited by pre-conceived focuses of attention, but has the limitation of being so diffuse as to sometimes generate rather unorganized notes. That is, you may take in "more" but recall less later. Structured observation, on the other hand, has the limitation of risking failure to observe important things that are not on your pre-ordered checklist of "observations to make"; but an important benefit is that in permitting yourself to operate according to a list,

you can record more specific information and truthfully replicate your observations again on another occasion. Structured observation, in short, provides you with comparable and replicable data.

It is best that you employ both methods, using each to corroborate the other. And you should begin with casual observations, since the initial period of observation will require adjustments on your part, and it is best not to let these initial adjustments get in the way of your systematic, structured observations.

Parent and Child Interviews

The importance of corroborating your observations with information directly elicited from people about their behavior has already been noted. You should never rely solely upon what you see, for what you see can often be 'colored' by your own cultural and personal view of the world. There is no automatic way of knowing whether your impressions as to what is taking place in a game are valid, unless you talk to the carriers of the tradition. In addition, there is no way of automatically knowing which are the most effective, your observations or what people say is happening. Relative to this, you'll recall the distinction made in CCRC Monograph I, and reiterated in this Monograph, between ideal and real culture. Another way of thinking of this distinction is that what people say is "normative" information (information that fits the standards of a society), usually reveals ideal culture; while what you observe is statistical information (actual occurrences of behavior), usually revealing real culture. The same parallels apply to the ideal and the real content of games.

As already mentioned above, it is often quite easy to strike up conversations about children's games. But in addition to casual

conversations, you should establish the opportunity to schedule interviews with both children and adults for the sole purpose of obtaining specific information about games.

One final thing deserves comment, and that is the distinction between passive and active bearers of information. All too often fieldworkers enter a community to collect stories or other aspects of folk traditions and, to facilitate getting the most information with the least effort and expenditure of time, they seek out people who are known to be "good story-tellers". These are often times highly talented individuals who are not particularly representative of the community at all. And what the researcher ends up with is a collection of stories from one individual, presumably representing "Tales of the so-and-so", when in fact he has no way of knowing whether the tales collected are known to others in the community or whether they are popular, taboo, or whatever. It is all too easy to overlook the passive bearer of the tradition in favor of the active bearer, and hence to obtain one-sided, unrepresentative information.

The same problem pertains to collecting and recording children's folkgames. The reserved, less-skilled, less-active child is just as important a source of information as the gregarious, assertive child you always see playing every time you go out to make your observations. Both of these dangers can be overcome through the use of comparative interviewing and comparative observation. (See CCRC Monograph II for a discussion of these field techniques.)

Casual interviews ("conversations") can take place on the spur-of-the-moment, and since no commitment has been made on either your part or the informant's part, there are few contingencies to consider.

Structured interviews, however, should be scheduled. People you wish to interview should be contacted ahead of time. They should be informed of exactly what it is you want to talk about, and how long the interview should take. The time and place should be arranged at their convenience. Be warned that one of the surest ways of alienating people is to tell them that you would like to drop by for a few moments to talk about nothing in particular, only for them to discover on the spot that you intended to interview them in detail and take notes for one or two hours all along!

PLAY ETHNOGRAPHY AND SCHOOLING

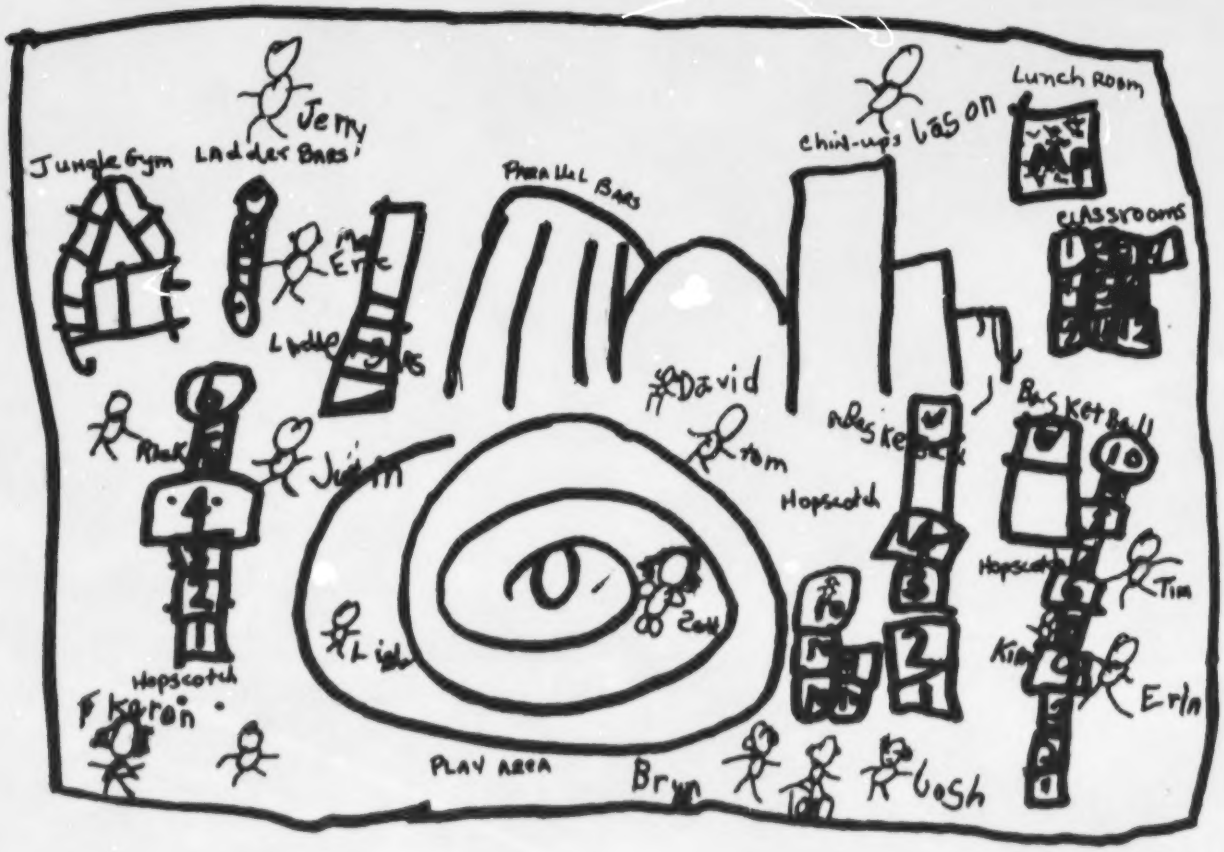
Although implicit in the discussion, the Monograph has made little direct reference to how the study of indigenous games and play might be useful to teachers and others involved in bilingual, cross-cultural education. In this final section we shall suggest a number of areas in which research findings can be applied.

Research

First, the investigation of games and play serves a research function. Teachers' descriptions and analysis of indigenous games and play can, potentially, contribute to play scholarship by helping to fill the gaps in the knowledge based on the varieties of play among ethnic groups and societies for whom there are, as yet, no play descriptions. And, a cataloguing of emic conceptions of play can be used to test the adequacy of current etic play and game classifications. Further, research findings can provide teachers with knowledge about their students which cannot readily be collected inside the classroom.

For example, as noted earlier, children's play often models important cultural patterns. The analysis of games and play can be instructive with regard to a society's social structure, values, age and sex roles, and socialization patterns. Too, the observant and sensitive teacher can learn not only about ethnic culture, but also about the range of cultural differences within one ethnic group--e.g., how children's emic perceptions differ from girls'.

For instance, consider the drawing below, rendered by a six year-old Euro-American boy when asked to draw his school. It goes without saying that this child's perception of the school environment, with its weighted priority to play and significant peers, varies considerably from that of most teachers.



Personnel Training

A second major area to which the study of indigenous play can contribute is staff development. Carrying out fieldwork among students from different ethnic groups will increase the teacher's understanding of cultural differences and of a comparative and cross-cultural perspective. In addition, it provides the teacher with an opportunity to practice using anthropological tools and techniques in an area of considerable interest to both researchers and researched. Research skills thus acquired can later be used in other areas of investigation. Another lesson illustrated by play ethnography is the relationship between formal education and informal education. By observing children at play the teacher sees learning taking place that is not teacher initiated or teacher directed. In fact, spontaneous play activities generally do not involve adults at all. Too often educators tend to assume that education takes place only in schools and that learning is a vertical process, with adults (namely teachers) instructing students. By watching children play, a teacher can easily see how a great deal of education occurs informally, both in school and outside, and how learning is also a horizontal process, with youth teaching youth. In this way the teacher can see an instance where children are knowers and they themselves are non-knowers. In carrying out fieldwork on play, traditional roles will thus be reversed, with the student being the teacher and the teacher being the student.

The study of play also clearly illustrates how culture is dynamic and constantly changing. Cultural patterns, passed down from one generation to another, are reflected and modeled in children's play

activities and, at the same time, cultural patterns are modified and created anew by children as they play. People, children as well as adults, are producers of culture as well as products of culture. By looking at how game rules change from one generation to another, or at how a game is modified from one group to another, we can see that individuals are free to shape culture as well as be shaped by it. Related to this we can see at work through games and play the forces for cultural continuity, a domesticating influence, and the forces for cultural revitalization and change, a process of liberation.

Curriculum and Instruction

The pedagogical implications for teachers of play ethnography are numerous. The same tools and techniques which teachers use in the study of games can be applied to the study of classroom activities and processes. The teacher/fieldworker can analyze the classroom as a cultural system to learn what values and behaviors are rewarded or discouraged, what skills are fostered, what learning styles are reinforced, what classroom management and organizational styles are practiced and what student roles and relationships are encouraged. With these insights in hand the teacher can compare formal and informal, school and out-of-school educational processes to determine where they overlap or differ, are compatible or in conflict. With some modifications, classroom lessons may be adjusted to reinforce and build upon the concepts and verbal and mathematical skills emphasized in children's games. Or, similarly, the types of social relationships, learning processes, and motivational styles at work in play activities can potentially be incorporated into classroom activities.

Related to the comparative analysis of children's play and formal

education, is the comparison of students at play outside of school and students at work in the classroom. Possible areas for consideration are comparisons of an individual student's strengths, interests, verbal and mathematical skills emphasized in children's games. Or, similarly, the types of social relationships, learning processes, and motivational styles at work in play activities can potentially be incorporated into classroom activities.

Related to the comparative analysis of children's play and formal education, is the comparison of students at play outside of school and students at work in the classroom. Possible areas for consideration are comparisons of an individual student's strengths, interests, verbal facility, and leadership potential demonstrated in the two different settings. Not only will this augment the teacher's knowledge and understanding of individual students, but it may suggest ways in which the teacher can build upon strengths and overcome weaknesses which had not been previously apparent.

Through the study of students' play activities outside of school, the teacher can also increase his or her rapport with students and demonstrate a genuine interest in their world. Further, by incorporating play ethnography into the classroom itself the teacher can provide opportunities for students to teach one another and to become directly involved in their own learning. Exploring games from different ethnic groups and teaching one another how to play new games can build rapport between students and respect for others, their traditions and identities. And, it can contribute to the development in students of a cross-cultural and comparative perspective. Too, it can provide students a chance to interview one another and develop their communica-

tion skills in either small or large group settings. In the area of play ethnography, students themselves can be researchers, collecting data and sharing it with their classmates and teacher. In this way, students can become directly involved in the curriculum development. Lesson plans can readily incorporate information on games to provide, for example, the subject matter for teaching about ethnic differences or about age and sex differences within ethnic groups.

Evaluation

A fourth area where play ethnography can pay off for teachers is the evaluation of bilingual/bicultural school programs. Most bilingual, cross-cultural projects include in their objectives the enhancement of the student's self-image and identity, and the development of social skills and respect for others. As suggested above, the incorporation of indigenous play activities into the classroom can contribute to the achievement of these objectives, as can many other types of activities. But most traditional methods of evaluation are woefully inadequate when it comes to measuring interpersonal and affective development. In general, the evaluation of educational programs emphasizes quantitative data, from the classroom, concentrating on cognitive skills. Thus, there is a need to look for new and creative ways to assess the success of bilingual/bicultural projects. What is needed is qualitative data, on interpersonal and affective growth as well as cognitive development, outside of the classroom as well as in. By analyzing children's spontaneous play activities, at recess, during gym, or even in the classroom, evaluators might gain new insights into the success of bilingual/bicultural projects. One possible evaluation design might compare free play during recess in ethnically segregated

schools, or schools without bilingual projects, with spontaneous play in schools which have had ongoing bilingual/bicultural projects for a number of years.

School and Community Ties

One final area to which play ethnography can potentially contribute is the strengthening of linkages between home and school. Simply by expressing interest in children's play activities the teacher/fieldworker can demonstrate a genuine interest in the students' cultural backgrounds. By modifying classroom activities to incorporate and build upon traditional cultural patterns, the teacher can increase the continuity between home and school culture. Interviewing parents about children's play can enhance teacher/parent rapport and can provide an avenue for involving parents in school activities. For example, community elders can be invited to talk about the games they played when they were children. Such a lesson can be used to demonstrate how culture changes over time and to illustrate the importance of having a diachronic perspective on culture. Through interviewing parents, and by involving them in school activities, the teacher also opens the door to discussing educational goals and objectives with them. This gives them the opportunity to choose which values and behaviors should be fostered by the school.

Another way of fostering school-community ties is to involve students themselves in parent oriented projects, such as requiring students to each obtain from their parents a simple game description to be shared in the classroom. Or, perhaps, older children can compose a class booklet of games they and their parents have played, also utilizing the opportunity to exercize their writing and drawing

skills.

This discussion of play ethnography and schooling has suggested how the discipline of anthropology can: (1) contribute to providing teachers (and students) with a cross-cultural and comparative perspective; (2) help teachers analyze and reflect critically upon classroom and instructional processes; and (3) contribute to the solution of culturally-based educational problems. In all three areas the use of anthropological concepts and methodologies can enhance a teacher's effectiveness in meeting the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Illustrations provided are by no means exhaustive of the potential ways in which the study of games and play might prove useful to teachers. We encourage our readers to explore other applications tailored more specifically to their particular situations and settings.

NOTES

1. Adapted from Kenelm O. L. Burridge, "A Tangu Game", Man, 57 (1957): 88-89.

2. If you wish to review a variety of definitions of play, see: Bateson, 1972; Gilmore, 1971; and Miller, 1973.

3. One of the best examples of a thorough catalogue with descriptions of games is Brian Sutton-Smith's, The Games of New Zealand Children, University of California Press, 1959. See, however, George Rich, Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 89 (1976), pgs. 99-102, for some critical comments and precautions on the organization of game collections. See also Opie (1969) and Gomme (1894-98) for extensive catalogue examples.

4. See selected references under Brian Sutton-Smith and John Roberts.

5. Adapted from M. Maccoby, N. Modiano, and P. Lander, "Games and Social Character in a Mexican Village", Psychiatry, 27 (1964: 150-162). It is important to understand the larger context for the variations made in the Mexican village. Individual villagers adhere to the ideals of democracy and cooperation, but these ideals have been submerged by a historical reality characterized by violence, exploitation, and scarcity.

6. Adapted from Maccoby, Modiano, and Lander.

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